

Co-Chairs Elliot and Haskell, and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee,

My name is Grace Sotis and I am currently a student at Manchester Community College and a legislative intern here in the Connecticut General Assembly. I live in the town of Windham and am a constituent of State Representative Johnson and State Senator Flexer. I am testifying in favor of House Bill 6374, An Act Concerning Sexual Misconduct On College Campuses. Sexual violence impacts all of us, directly or not. Sexual violence is unfortunately especially prevalent on college campuses, and this bill will make strides against it.

It is averaged that the state of Connecticut spends over five million dollars per year regarding sexual violence, including lost wages and emergency department medical costs. The passing of this bill will not only help curb this cost, but it will create a safer environment for students in the state like me. Sexual assault is most likely to happen to women ages 18-24, which is heavily a college population. College students who are victims of sexual violence report to be three times more likely to miss school out of fear of reencountering their assailant or experiencing additional sexual trauma. Survivors of sexual violence should not feel unsafe on their own campuses to the point where it becomes a hindrance to their education.

If passed, this bill will enact two things: a biennial campus climate survey and an amnesty policy requirement. The implementation of a biennial campus climate survey will require colleges across Connecticut to provide students with surveys in order to collect anonymous data about their personal experiences with sexual violence on campus. This will include a task force to manage this process, a base survey to assist universities, and incentives for those involved. The most important detail of this survey is that it is anonymous; students will feel safer under the cloak of anonymity, which will result in victims being more likely to report. In order to fight college sexual violence, it must be fully understood, and the first step of doing so is collecting necessary statistics. The two-year frequency of this survey is imperative to greater campus violence prevention. A biennial campus climate survey has been similarly implemented in other states such as New York and Maryland, where positive results have arisen.

The amnesty policy requirement will also require Connecticut colleges to enforce an amnesty policy, which will not punish students who were intoxicated during the assault. The involvement of drugs and alcohol during campus sexual assaults are incredibly common, and this amnesty

policy helps to address that. Sexual violence is never the victim's fault, including if any parties involved were under the influence. The amnesty policy requirement creates a safer and fairer environment for survivors to come forward regarding their assault, as well as destigmatizes the presence of substances during sexual violence.

One in five women will experience sexual violence during their time in college, as well as one in sixteen men. Furthermore, sexual violence disproportionately affects queer and transgender students, as well as Black, Indigenous, and other women of Color. The undeniable negative effects of sexual violence lead six in ten survivors to develop depression and PTSD and cause a significant decline in both physical and mental health. If enacted, this bill will lower these disheartening statistics, improve the education of students across the state, and most importantly, make students like myself feel safer.

Thank you for your time,

Grace Sotis